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God *ad intra* and God *ad extra*: The Relationship Between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity as Reflected in the Works of John Zizioulas and Dumitru Stăniloae

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Abstract
This article compares the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity in John Zizioulas and Dumitru Stăniloae. Although they did not explicitly engage one another's work, their approaches share a patristic inheritance while revealing distinctive emphases. After outlining the Orthodox distinction between God ad intra and God ad extra, the article examines divine transcendence, freedom, and communion. Zizioulas stresses the irreducibility of God's eternal life to salvation history, safeguarding divine freedom against historical necessity. Stăniloae maintains this distinction while exploring how eternal Trinitarian communion is manifested in history, particularly through the relationship between the Son and the Spirit. Their difference concerns theological priorities rather than an opposition between separation and identity. Both affirm that the God revealed in history is the eternal Triune God, whose mystery revelation discloses without exhausting.

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Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993)[1] and John Zizioulas (1931–2023)[2] are giant figures of modern Orthodox theology and emblematic representatives of the Neo-patristic movement in Eastern Christianity. Both significantly contributed to the development of 20th-century Orthodox theology and exerted a lasting influence upon contemporary reflections on the central themes of Eastern Christian faith and their relevance for the modern world. Surprisingly, despite shared theological concerns and partial chronological contemporaneity, their theological works remain disconnected: they neither entered explicit dialogue with one another nor offered sustained engagement or critique of each other's thought. This absence of interaction is all the more striking given the proximity of their theological interests: the revival of patristic thought, Trinitarian theology, ecclesiology, anthropology, personhood, communion, etc.[3]

[1] See Petre Maican, "Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993)," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Modern Theology,* ed. Philip E. Ziegler and R. David Nelson (T&T Clark, 2026), 673–676; Calinic Berger, "Dumitru Stăniloae," in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern,* ed. Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise (Ashgate, 2013), 393–402; Lucian Turcescu, ed., *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Center for Romanian Studies, 2003); Ioan Ică Jr., "Stăniloae, Dumitru (1903–1993)," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology,* ed. Trevor A. Hart (Pater Noster Press – William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 527–531.

[2] See Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (SPCK, 2015), 214–225; Nikolaos Asproulis, "John Zizioulas," in *Orthodox Handbook for Ecumenism: Recourses for Theological Education,* eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Cyril Hovorun, et. al. (Volos Academy Publications in cooperation with WCC Publications and Regnum Books International, 2014), 254–257; Lars Erik Rikheim, "Johannes Zizioulas," in *Key Theological Thinkers,* eds. Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise (Routledge, 2013) 435–447; Douglas H. Knight, ed., *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Ashgate 2007).

[3] Their most representative books are: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vols. I-III (Ed. IBMOBOR, 1st ed. 1978; 3rd ed. 2003) [English translation: *The Experience*

Even though academic attempts at comparing their theological projects are not completely missing,[4] there are areas of mutual interest, especially in the field of Trinitarian theology, that deserve to be brought into dialogue and direct conversation in order to emphasize both the commonalities and the divergent perspectives between these two towering figures of 20th-century Orthodox Christianity. A major example in this regard is Stăniloae's and Zizioulas's respective approaches to the relationship between the immanent Trinity (*God ad intra*) and the economic Trinity (*God ad extra*). Whereas both of them rejected Karl Rahner's notion of a perfect identity between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, thus remaining faithful to the Greek patristic tradition, the way in which Stăniloae and Zizioulas articulated the relationship between *God ad intra* and *God ad extra* diverged to a certain extent. As this article shows, Zizioulas was reluctant to read the economic Trinity back into the immanent Trinity. Stăniloae, by contrast, was open to the idea that the relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in history could be indicative of their eternal communion or *perichoresis*. Behind their

of God, vols. 1–6 (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998–2013)]; Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (1st ed. Craiova, 1987; 3rd edition Basilica, 2013); Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia ortodoxă* (1st ed. Craiova, 1986; 2nd ed. Ed. IBMBOR, 2004) [English translation: *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2025)]; Stăniloae, *Ascetica și mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe* (1st ed. Ed. IBMBOR, 1981; 4th ed. Basilica, 2019) [English translation: *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful* (St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 2002); Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos și restaurarea omului* (1st ed. Sibiu, 1943; 3rd ed. Basilica, 2013); John Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* (Sebastian Press, 2023); Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World* (T&T Clark, 2011); Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today* (Sebastian Press, 2010); Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (T&T Clark, 2009); Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (T&T Clark, 2006); Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

[4] See, for example, Maxym Lysack, *Asceticism and the Eucharist*: *Exploring Orthodox Spirituality with Metropolitan John Zizioulas* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2023); Viorel Coman, "Orthodox Neo-Patristic Theology and the West: Dumitru Stăniloae on the Holy Spirit in the Church," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 74:3–4 (2022): 262–278; Calinic Berger, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Stăniloae and Zizioulas," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51:1 (2007): 23–70.

divergent approaches lie distinct theological concerns that this article explores in order to explain the underlying reasons for their different approaches to the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity.

The article is divided into three main sections. The first section offers a brief presentation of the relationship between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity in Eastern Christianity. The second section analyses John Zizioulas's understanding of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. The third section investigates Dumitru Stăniloae's views on the link between the two.

Eastern Christianity on the Relationship Between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity: A Sketch

A key question in the Christian doctrine of God concerns the relationship between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity, that is, between the way God exists eternally (*sub specie aeternitatis*) and the way God reveals himself in the history of salvation (*sub specie temporis*). Theological discourse draws a nuanced distinction between *Deus ad intra* and *Deus ad extra*: between God as he exists in himself, apart from his relation to creation (*theologia*), and God as he manifests himself in his actions within the world, history, and time (*oikonomia*). Therefore, to articulate and distinguish these two dimensions (the eternal and the temporal), Christian theology conventionally speaks of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity.

In Roman Catholic theology, Karl Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, articulated in his work *The Trinity* (1970),[5] asserts a perfect identity and symmetry between the immanent and the economic Trinity: *the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.*[6] Orthodox theology, however, sub-

[5] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (Herder and Herder, 1970).

[6] *The Trinity*, 22. For a detailed analysis of Rahner's Grundaxiom, see the following works: Godefroid Mukenge Kabuya, *Le « Grundaxiom » de Karl Rahner comme paradigme du renouveau trinitaire au XXe siècle. Une relecture interdisciplinaire* (Peter Lang, 2019); Emmanuel Durand, « L'identité rahnérienne entre la Trinité économique et la

scribes to Rahner's insight only partially. Orthodox theology affirms a real distinction, yet not a separation, between *Deus ad intra* and *Deus ad extra*, between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. Orthodox theology proposes a qualified reformulation of Rahner's axiom: *the economic Trinity is truly the immanent Trinity, but the immanent Trinity is not reducible to the economic Trinity*. This reformulation follows from the following convictions.

First, it follows from the conviction that history, time, and space cannot adequately encompass the fullness of divine life and mystery. In this regard, it is a strong belief of modern Orthodox theology,[7] inspired by the Greek patristic doctrine of the Trinity and Christology, that the manner in which God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) "exists within the eternal life of the Trinity surpasses what has been revealed to humanity in the economy of salvation. While God truly manifests himself and acts within history, these salvific actions do not exhaust the fullness of his eternal and glorious mystery."[8] But, even though the fullness of God's inner divine life transcends the limits of historical manifestation, Orthodox theology acknowledges the fact that the God

Trinité immanente à l'épreuve de ses applications », *Revue Thomiste* 103:1 (2003): 75–92; Fred Sanders, "Entangled in the Trinity: Economic and Immanent Trinity in Recent Theology," *Dialog* 40 (Fall, 2001): 175–182.

[7] For an Orthodox approach to the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, see the following two publications: Ioan Moga, «Treimea imanent» și «Treimea iconomică». Probleme și perspective ale unei distincții teologice" [«Immanent Trinity» and «Economic Trinity». Problems and Perspectives of A Theological Distinction], *Studii Teologice*, new series, 7:3 (2011): 21–56; Sorin Șelaru, "Eternal Intra-Trinitarian Relations and their Economic Consequences. An Approach according to Father Dumitru Stăniloae's Theological Perspective," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 2:1 (2011): 83–93.

[8] Augustin (Viorel) Coman, "Hristologia Sinodului I Ecumenic de la Niceea (325): *Theologia & Oikonomia*" [The Christology of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325): *Theologia & Oikonomia*], in *Sinodul I Ecumenic de la Niceea (325): Credința ortodoxă – baza unității Bisericii* [The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325): Christian Faith – the basis of the Church's Unity], ed. Sorin Șelaru, Nicușor Beldiman, George Grigoriță, and Augustin (Viorel) Coman (Basilica, 2025), 263–281, here at 266. See also, Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study," in *The One and the Many,* 3–16, especially at 24.

who reveals himself within time is none other than the eternal God and that there is no discontinuity or separation between *Deus ad intra* and *Deus ad extra*.

Second, the reformulation of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* by Orthodox theology follows from the conviction that God reveals himself in history freely and kenotically, without necessarily replicating the eternal mode of intra-Trinitarian life. A paradigmatic example in this sense is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who took on human nature and entered history through a voluntary act of kenosis. It is true that in humbling himself and in adapting to the conditions of the created world, Christ did not relinquish or diminish his divinity. However, as Dumitru Stăniloae pointed out, in Christ the divinity remained unchanged in the act of incarnation and *kenosis*; yet it "was adapted to the measures of human nature, so that this nature may be able to be assumed by the Son of God."[9] Without the act of kenosis, the human nature could not receive all the glory and power of the Son. Based on these observations, Orthodox theology considers the economy of salvation as defined by divine humbleness and self-emptying, whereas the inner life of God is characterized by eternal glory, thereby allowing for the distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity.

Third, Orthodox theology's refusal to fully endorse Rahner's *Grundaxiom* also stems from the conviction that the economic Trinity is dependent upon the immanent Trinity, while the immanent Trinity remains independent of the economic Trinity. In other words, the economic Trinity presupposes the immanent Trinity, whereas the converse does not hold. A similar observation underlies the critique of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* by the French Dominican theologian Yves Congar,[10] which shows that not all modern Catholic theologians fully equate the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity and vice-versa, thus preserving the Eastern and Western classical distinction between the two.

[9] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*. Vol. 3: *The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011), 57.

[10] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. III (Seabury Press, 1983), 13–18.

Fourth, Orthodox theology's reformulation of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* is shaped by St Gregory Palamas's distinction in God between the divine essence and the divine energies.[11] For Palamas, this distinction is real, not merely epistemological. On this account, the identity between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity lies in the fact that the same divine persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who exist in the Trinity *ad intra* are the very ones who act in the history of salvation. Accordingly, there is a personal identity between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity. The distinction, however, arises from the fact that the immanent Trinity is centred upon the divine essence at its centre, whereas the economic Trinity is centred upon the uncreated energies. This is to say that the divine essence, which remains in itself inaccessible, incommunicable, and wholly apophatic, is communicated to creation through its divine energies.[12]

Having briefly outlined the Orthodox theological account of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, the following sections demonstrate that, even within Eastern Christianity, notable differences can be observed in the ways modern theologians such as Zizioulas and Stăniloae have articulated the connection between God *ad intra* and God *ad extra*, particularly with regard to the extent to which the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity.

John Zizioulas: Preserving Divine Freedom

Although Zizioulas turned explicitly to the mystery of God at a later stage of his career, he made the doctrine of the Trinity a foundational pillar of his theology, alongside ecclesiology, anthropology, eschatology, and ecumenism. For Zizioulas, a constitutive el-

[11] For a comprehensive introduction to the theme of the Palamite distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies, see Tikhon Pino, *Essence and Energies: Being and Naming God in St Gregory Palamas* (Routledge, 2024); Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age* (Oxford University Press, 2019); John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (SPCK, 1964).

[12] Cf. Dumitru Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator* [Jesus Christ Pantokrator] (Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2005), 135.

ement of Christianity's central truth is that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—entails: (i) a relational ontology, in which God's very being is communion; (ii) the monarchy of the Father, who eternally begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit and thus constitutes the source and cause (*aitia*) of God's Trinitarian being as relational; (iii) the grounding of this relational being in the person of the Father, such that God's Trinitarian existence is not a product of necessity but an event of freedom, fundamentally personal rather than substance-based; and (iv) the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity, understood as communion and freedom, decisively shapes both ecclesiology and Christian anthropology.[13]

The question of the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity did not receive extensive treatment in Zizioulas's theology. Much of what he had to say on this topic is primarily confined to brief sections in the following works: the article "The Teaching of the Second Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective" (1983);[14] the article "The Doctrine of the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study" (1991);[15] and the book *Lectures in Christian Dog-*

[13] For a comprehensive introduction to Zizioulas's Trinitarian theology, see: Dario Chiapetti, *The Father's Eternal Freedom: The Personalist Trinitarian Ontology of John Zizioulas* (James Clarke & Co., 2022); Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Contemporary Orthodox Currents on the Trinity," in *Oxford Handbook on the Trinity,* ed. Gilles Emery OP and Matthew Levering (Oxford University Press, 2011), 328–338, especially 334–338; Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Paul M. Collins, *Trinitarian theology, West and East: Karl Barth, the Cappadocian Fathers, and John Zizioulas* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Patricia Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God* (Liturgical Press, 2001).

[14] Zizioulas, "The Teaching of the Second Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective," in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, Atti del Congresso Teologico Internazionale di Pneumatologia, Vol. I, ed. J. Martins (Libreria Editrice Vaticano, 1983), 29–54. The article has been republished as "Pneumatology and the Importance of the Person," in Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 178–205 [references in this article are based on the version published in *Communion and Otherness*].

[15] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study" was first published in Alisdair I. C. Heron, ed., *The Forgotten Trinity: A Selection of Papers Presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (British Council of Churches, 1991), 19–32. This article has been republished in Zizioulas, *The*

matics (2009),[16] which gathers material from his lectures in Dogmatics given across three decades to students in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, and Thessaloniki. We will begin with the last two works as they reflect on Rahner's *Grundaxiom* in quite similar terms, which preserves God's freedom and transcendence.

The article "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today" (1991) offers a brief but solid critique of Rahner's assertion that "the God of history and God in His eternal being are one and the same."[17] Zizioulas argues that this theological identification reflects an accommodation to a post-Enlightenment and post-Kantian worldview that is reluctant to engage with transcendence and instead seeks to explain reality entirely in terms of immanence. Within this framework, theologians who wish to remain relevant face a strong temptation to demonstrate the significance of Trinitarian doctrine by presenting it as an essential dimension of human experience.[18] Zizioulas maintains that although Rahner's *Grundaxiom* holds considerable appeal for many contemporary theologians, it ultimately generates as many difficulties as it seeks to resolve. The identification creates insurmountable obstacles as follows.

To begin with, it represents a return to the classical monism of ancient Greek philosophy, in which the being of God was conflated with the being of the world. The Fathers of the Church, as Zizioulas emphasizes, devoted significant effort to moving away from monism in order to safeguard God's freedom in relation to the world. As he notes, "It took the early Fathers (Irenaeus, Athanasius, etc.) a great deal of effort to break down this Greek monism which they thought—and rightly so— endangered the absolute ontological *freedom of God*, i.e., His transcendence."[19] The patristic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* stands thus as a decisive theological affirmation of God's absolute freedom and transcen-

One and the Many, 3–16 [references in this article are based on the version published in *The One and the Many*].

[16] Zizioulas, "Chapter 2: The Doctrine of God," in *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, especially 69–75 [hereinafter quoted as Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*].

[17] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 8.

[18] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 8.

[19] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 8 [emphasis mine].

dence, underscoring the radical distinction between God's being and the being of the world.[20] According to Zizioulas, if the doctrine of the Trinity is construed simply on the basis of the economy of salvation, any distinction between ontology and epistemology or between being and revelation collapses, marking a return to the classical Greek thought. This is why Zizioulas claims that apophatic theology allows us to say that even if "the Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity, the Immanent Trinity is not exhausted in the Economic Trinity."[21]

In addition, Zizioulas states that if no distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity is preserved, then the Incarnation and the Cross are projected into God's eternal being, rendering suffering a dimension of the immanent Trinity, something that the Fathers of the Church always resisted.[22] If God does not transcend suffering, no hope is offered to humanity in the face of violence, conflicts, and the brokenness of the world. For this reason, Zizioulas concludes by saying that "what we can say about God from God's acts in history is different from what we can say looking at God as He is eternally."[23]

In *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, Zizioulas's engagement with the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity once again—though in a new way—reflects his concern to protect God's freedom. As Zizioulas stated, if we affirm that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and vice-versa, "this way we would turn the economic into a necessity to which God was bound rather than God's own act made in

[20] "They [the Fathers of the Church] produced the doctrine of creatio *ex nihilo* precisely in order to show that God existed *before* and *regardless of the world*, and thus that it is imperative to be able to refer to God without implicitly or explicitly referring at the same time to the world." Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 8.

[21] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 8.

[22] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 8. Jürgen Moltmann's theology, following Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, claimed that suffering is central to the Trinity, departing from patristic views on the impassibility of God. See Jürgen Moltmann's book, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God,* trans. Margaret Kohl (Harper & Row, 1981). Other theologians followed in the footsteps by Moltmann.

[23] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today," 9.

freedom."[24] In other words, if the economy of God's relationship with us reproduces God's eternal existence, then it looks like God cannot act freely in history but must always act in a fixed and necessary way determined by the manner in which God exists eternally. Therefore, for Zizioulas, it is crucial to emphasize that the economic Trinity does not exhaust the immanent Trinity, for only by maintaining this distinction does the divine mystery remain irreducible to God's revelation in history and God's freedom remains untouched. This apophatic approach to God, which does not entirely identify the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity, shows that "we are always unable to possess and control God."[25] If God's eternal way of being can be entirely construed based on God's disclosure in history, this would allow a totalising and exhaustive comprehension of God, which could no longer escape our attempt to define and control the divine.[26] Zizioulas considers that, in this case, God's freedom would be compromised beyond remedy.

To exemplify the distinction in the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, Zizioulas appeals to the way the Greek Fathers avoided attributing the economy to unique and particular characteristics of the persons of the eternal Trinity. In Zizioulas's words, "though the Son is the revelation of the Father ('He who has seen me has seen the Father'), this does not necessarily mean that the Son has this function and attribute in the eternal Trinity."[27] And he continues by saying that "if the Spirit signifies love and creates communion for us, this does not mean this is due to a specific attribute of the Spirit in the eternal Trinity."[28] In other words, when it comes to the immanent Trinity,

[24] Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics,* 71.

[25] Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics,* 70.

[26] Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics,* 70.

[27] Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 72

[28] Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics,* 72. Zizioulas argues that in Western theology, beginning with Augustine, the Son came to be identified with knowledge and the Spirit with love or communion, both within the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, a move that ultimately gave rise to the doctrine of the *Filioque*, which continues to be a point of debate between Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity. For a

it is inaccurate to identify the Son with knowledge and the Spirit with love or communion. According to Zizioulas, "whatever the differentiated actions of God in the economy, they are not extensions or differentiations within the eternal Trinity."[29] Within the immanent Trinity, all action is one, common, and eternal; yet in the economy of salvation, this unified action is manifested in distinct ways, so the persons do not all perform the same tasks.

In the article "The Teaching of the Second Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective," Zizioulas illustrates the distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity by referring to the Palamite distinction in God between the essence and the uncreated energies. According to Zizioulas, such a distinction is useful to safeguard both the absolute transcendence of God without alienating him from the world and the connection between *theologia* and *oikonomia*. As he says, "'*Energy*', by being *uncreated*, involves in history and creation the very being of God; yet, by being distinct from God's '*essence*', it allows for God's immanent being to be 'incomprehensible' and truly *beyond* history and creation."[30] That being the case, the distinction between the essence and the uncreated energies preserves the link between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity because the energies, which are addressed *ad extra*, stem from God's being and cannot be dissociated from it. At the same time, the same distinction affirms simultaneously the transcendence of *theologia*, because the essence, by not being identical with the energies, remains beyond history.[31]

To conclude this section, it is relevant to say that if there is a theme that runs like a thread throughout Zizioulas's reflections

detailed presentation of Augustine's understanding of the Son as knowledge and the Spirit as love and communion, see the following monograph by Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 251–318.

[29] Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics,* 72.

[30] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 202.

[31] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 202. For a detailed discussion on the topic of "energy/essence" and "economic/immanent Trinity," see Duncan Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology* (Scholars Press, 1997).

on the subtle distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, which should never collapse into a separation, then this theme would be the insistence on God's freedom in relation to creation and the world. The idea of freedom occupies a central place in Zizioulas's theology to the extent that all other topics he addresses (the doctrine of the Trinity, anthropology, ecclesiology, eschatology) are largely ordered around it and receive their coherence from it. Even if freedom is not the sole structuring principle of Zizioulas's theology, it plays a decisive role in shaping and integrating his thoughts.[32]

When it comes to the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, Zizioulas's main concern is to affirm that *Deus ad intra* is constrained neither by history nor by anything else. *Deus ad intra* is irreducible to *Deus ad extra*. This does not introduce a gap between the two but aims at safeguarding the apophatic nature, transcendence, and the freedom of God's eternal existence.[33]

[32] Given the centrality of the freedom–necessity dialectic in Zizioulas's theology, many scholars characterize him as a theologian shaped by an existentialist concern. See, for example, Lucian Turcescu's article, "'Person' versus 'Individual,' and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa," *Modern Theology* 18:4 (2002): 527–539. For a response to Turcescu's article, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? Response to Lucian Turcescu," *Modern Theology* 20:4 (2004): 601–607. The topic of freedom in Zizioulas's theology is also discussed by Douglas Farrow in his article "Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, ed. Douglas Knight, 109–123.

[33] However, theologians such as Aristotle Papanikolaou interpret Zizioulas as rejecting both a strict separation and an exhaustive identification between the economic and immanent Trinity. According to Papanikolaou, for Zizioulas, the economic Trinity genuinely reveals who God is eternally: what is manifested in Christ and experienced in the Spirit is not merely a created representation of God but a real participation in God's own Trinitarian mode of existence. At the same time, the economic manifestation does not exhaust the immanent Trinity. God's eternal being remains transcendent and cannot simply be deduced from everything that occurs in salvation history—for example, Christ's suffering in the economy should not be understood as implying suffering in God's eternal being. Thus, Papanikolaou sees Zizioulas as offering a *qualified identification* between the economic and immanent Trinity. For Zizioulas, this relationship is understood primarily through *personhood and communion* rather than through an essence–energies distinction or any other distinction. The Church, particularly in the Eucharist through the Holy Spirit, genuinely participates in the eternal relational life of Father, Son, and Spirit; therefore, the Trinity encountered in the economy is genuinely the immanent

Dumitru Stăniloae: An Orthodox Attempt at Linking the Two

Like John Zizioulas, Dumitru Stăniloae turned his sustained attention to Trinitarian theology relatively late in his academic journey. Before 1964, the theme of the Trinity did not occupy a central place in his work. In the decades that followed, however, Trinitarian doctrine came to function as a foundational axis of his theological framework, shaping his thought in a decisive way, particularly in relation to ecclesiology.[34] In contrast to many 20th-century Orthodox theologians, who tended to avoid detailed reflection on the inner structure of the immanent Trinity, Dumitru Stăniloae stands out for articulating an intricate account of the divine communion shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[35] His approach drew significantly on the theological contributions of Byzantine thinkers such as Gregory II of Cyprus (1241–1290), Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), and Joseph Bryennios (1359–1438).

Trinity, even though God's essence remains beyond comprehension. See Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), especially 99–101.

[34] See, for example, Viorel Coman, *Dumitru Stăniloae's Trinitarian Ecclesiology: Orthodoxy and the Filioque* (Lexington Press/Fortress Academic, 2019), 167; Coman, "Different Orthodox Perspectives on the Ecclesiological Ramifications of the Filioque: Trinitarian Ecclesiology vs. Eucharistic Ecclesiology," *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58:1–4 (2017): 1–22, here at 8.

[35] In this respect, Dumitru Stăniloae differs markedly from Vladimir Lossky, who adopted a strongly apophatic stance toward the inner life of the Trinity, emphasizing the ultimate incomprehensibility of God's immanent being. In Stăniloae's theology, the immanent Trinity is approached through a more deliberate equilibrium between apophatic reserve and cataphatic affirmation, allowing for both reverent acknowledgment of divine mystery and carefully articulated theological insight. See Viorel Coman, "Unity and Diversity in the Church: Vladimir Lossky's Reflection on the Roles of Christ and the Spirit in the Church, and Its Critical Reception in Dumitru Stăniloae's Theology," in *Umstrittene Katholizität: Von der zwiespältigen Beziehung zwischen Vielfalt und Einheit – Catholicity under Pressure: The Ambiguous Relationship between Diversity and Unity : Tagungsbericht der 18. Wissenschaftlichen Konsultation der Societas Oecumenica | Proceedings of the 18th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica*, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau, 105, ed. Dagmar Heller, Peter Szentpétery (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 303–322; see also Silviu-Eugen Rogobete, "Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation?: Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae," in *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology,* ed. L. Turcescu, 167–206.

Regarding the relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity, Dumitru Stăniloae did not provide a systematic treatment of their interconnection in his published writings. Nevertheless, his broader Trinitarian reflections contain ample material that allows one to discern how he implicitly understands the dynamic correlation between God's inner life and God's self-revelation in history. Several publications by Stăniloae illuminate this implicit perspective, even if they do not frame the issue in strictly technical terms. His most relevant article on the topic is "Relațiile Treimice și viața Bisericii" [Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church], published in 1964.[36] Before examining how Stăniloae articulates his understanding of the immanent Trinity in relation to the economic Trinity and *vice-versa*, it is necessary to outline the theological context within which his Trinitarian thought initially took shape.

Early 20th-century debates concerning the ecclesiological consequences of the doctrine of the *Filioque* sparked Stăniloae's interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. Until the 20th century, the theological controversy between Eastern and Western Christianity surrounding the *Filioque* remained largely confined to the strictly intra-Trinitarian dimension of the issue. With the emergence of the writings of Russian theologians in the Parisian diaspora, particularly Lev Karsavine and Vladimir Lossky, the *Filioque* also came to be interpreted as an ecclesiological issue, in the sense that it was seen to carry implications not only for Trinitarian doctrine but also for the Church's structure, unity, and mode of communion.[37] For example, in Lossky's opinion, the *Filioque* is to be blamed for what he perceived as the development of a deficient Roman Catholic ecclesiology: the lack of solid pneumatology;

[36] Dumitru Stăniloae, "Relațiile Treimice și viața Bisericii," *Ortodoxia* 16:4 (1964): 503–525. English translation in: Dumitru Stăniloae, "Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church," in *Theology and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 11–44.

[37] For a detailed analysis of the debates on the ecclesiological consequences of the *Filioque*, see: Coman, *Dumitru Stăniloae's Trinitarian Ecclesiology,* especially 24–34; Coman, "Dumitru Stăniloae on the Filioque: The Trinitarian Relationship Between the Son and the Spirit, and Its Relevance for the Ecclesiological Synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 49:4 (2014): 553–576, especially 554–558.

ecclesiological Christomonism; over-institutionalism; Papal primacy and infallibility.[38] The response of Catholic and Protestant theologians was swift to follow. According to Karl Barth,[39] Marie-Joseph Le Guillou[40] and others, it is precisely a Trinitarian theology without the *Filioque* that has negative ecclesiological reverberations: a separation between pneumatology and Christology in ecclesiology as a result of a clear relation between the Spirit and the Son in the immanent Trinity; and a split between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity as a consequence of the fact that the relation between the Son and the Spirit in the history of salvation (the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son) is not taken as an indicative of their eternal relation (the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son).[41]

In response to critiques advanced by Western theologians, Dumitru Stăniloae—relying on the theological insights of the Byzantine tradition—formulated a Trinitarian model that more precisely articulated the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit within the immanent life of the Trinity in terms of

[38] Lossky's criticism is scarcely developed in his works; however, his disciple Olivier Clément, who edited some of Lossky's unpublished works, unpacked and amplified his ideas. See Olivier Clément, "Vladimir Lossky, un théologien de la personne et du Saint Esprit," *Messager de l'Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale* 8 (1959): 137–206.

[39] Karl Barth, *The Gottingen Dogmatics: Instructions in the Christian Religion* (Eerdmans, 1991), 129; Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Vol. I, Part I (T&T Clark, 1975), 548–551.

[40] Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, "La critique du *filioque* de L.P. Karsavine," *Istina* 17:3–4 (1972): 304–307.

[41] Not all Eastern and Western theologians accepted the view that the filioque—or its omission—entails serious ecclesiological consequences. For example, Sergius Bulgakov pointed out that "It would have been natural to expect that the existence of such grave heresy, of such fundamental divergence, would permeate the entire life of the two churches and their entire doctrine. Over the course of many years, I have sought traces of this influence, and I have attempted to comprehend the *life*-significance of this divergence and to find out *where* and *in what* it is manifested *in practice*. And I must admit that I have not been able to find this practical life significance; and, more than that, I deny that there is any such significance." See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 131. The French Dominican theologian Yves Congar also said that "the quarrel about the ecclesiological consequences of the filioque is of doubtful value." See Yves Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint: vol. III, Le fleuve de vie qui coule en Orient et en Occident* (Éditions du Cerf, 1980), 276.

manifestation, while simultaneously underscoring the intrinsic link between *Deus ad intra* and *Deus ad extra*.

Drawing on the pneumatological motif of Augustinian inspiration found in the theology of Gregory Palamas, Dumitru Stăniloae described the Holy Spirit as the eternal love between the Father and the Son. Yet he did so without embracing the *Filioque* doctrine traditionally associated with this Augustinian framework, carefully preserving the Orthodox affirmation of the Father as the sole source (*archē*) within the Trinity.[42] In addition, appealing to the distinction articulated by Gregory II of Cyprus between the Spirit's eternal procession from the Father and His eternal manifestation through the Son,[43] Stăniloae further clarified how one may speak of an eternal relation of the Spirit to the Son without compromising the monarchy of the Father.

Stăniloae's Trinitarian model can be concisely outlined as follows, particularly with regard to the eternal relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit.

First, the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and comes to rest in the Son, who is thus revealed as the Spirit's everlasting dwelling place. In this eternal movement from the Father toward the Son, the Spirit communicates to the Son the Father's love. Such procession—whereby the Spirit originates from the Father and abides in the Son—constitutes an eternal act of origination grounded in the Father's monarchy.[44]

[42] See Viorel Coman, "Le Saint-Esprit comme liaison de l'amour éternel entre le Père et le Fils : un cas de 'sobornicité ouverte' dans la théologie orthodoxe moderne," *Irénikon* 89:1 (2016): 25–51.

[43] See Aristeides Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium: The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283–1289)* (Fordham University Press, 1986); Joost van Rossum, "Gregory Of Cyprus and Palamism," *Studia Patristica* vol. 37 (Peeters, 2001), 626–630; and Olivier Clément, "Grégoire de Cypre: 'De l'exorèse du Saint Esprit," *Istina* 17: 3–4 (1972): 443–456.

[44] Dumitru Stăniloae, "Purcederea Duhului Sfânt de la Tatăl și relația lui cu Fiul, ca temei al îndumnezeirii și înfierii noastre," *Ortodoxia* 31:3–4 (1979): 583–592, here at 588. [English translation: "The Procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and His Relation to the Son, as the Basis of Our Deification and Adoption," in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy,* Faith and Order Paper no. 103, ed. Lukas Vischer (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981), 174–186, here at 181.]

Second, the Spirit, who rests in the Son, also shines forth toward the Father from the beloved Son. This shining forth expresses the loving response of the Logos to the Father's loving initiative in causing the Spirit to proceed. Within this Trinitarian exchange of love, the Son does not "possess" the Spirit as the Father does, since He is not the Spirit's cause or source of existence. Consequently, the Spirit's shining forth from the Son is not an act of origination but one of eternal manifestation.[45]

Third, the Holy Spirit preserves the distinctness of the Father and the Son, preventing their communion of love from collapsing into an indistinguishable unity. In this way, the Spirit safeguards personal differentiation within the Trinity. At the same time, He is the bond of love uniting the Father and the Son, and thus is intrinsically linked to the very reality of divine communion.[46]

Fourth, by resting in the Son and joyfully shining forth toward the Father, the Spirit and the Son exist in a perichoretic unity so profound that neither is conceived apart from the other. The hypostasis of the Son is marked eternally by the presence of the Spirit, just as the Spirit's personal identity is revealed in relation to the Son.

It is clear from what has been said so far that Stăniloae holds on to a distinction within the immanent Trinity between relationships of origin (begetting and procession) and relationships of perichoresis or communion, understood as manifestation. To link the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, Stăniloae pointed out that the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the economy of salvation reflects their relations of communion within the inner life of God. In other words, the economy of salvation does not reproduce the relations of origins but the dynamics of eternal communion between the Trinitarian

[45] Stăniloae, "Relațiile Treimice și viața Bisericii," 508–509; "Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church," 30–31.

[46] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, Vol. I, 323; *The Experience of God: Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God,* vol. I, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Holy Cross Orthodox Pres, 1998), 268–269. See also the book by Dumitru Stăniloae on the Holy Trinity: *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea* [The Holy Trinity: In the Beginning There Was Love], 2nd ed. (Ed. I.B.M.B.O.R, 2005), 70, 72.

persons to the extent that "the indissoluble union between Christ and the Holy Spirit who truly constitutes the Church and sustains the life of the Christian within the Church has its profound roots in that indissoluble union which according to Orthodox teaching exists between them within the sphere of their inner Trinitarian relations."[47]

To clarify his claim, Stăniloae contended that the circle of Trinitarian love existing *ad intra* between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit extends *ad extra*—that is, to the Church and the entire creation. The same Spirit who proceeds eternally from the Father and rests eternally upon the Son also abides upon the threefold body of Christ in history.[48] The Spirit descends upon Christ's physical body at Baptism to confirm and sanctify His mission in the world. At Pentecost, the Spirit likewise descends upon the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, to extend it throughout history and to incorporate all those who believe in Christ as adoptive children of the Father. In the Liturgy, the Spirit also descends upon the gifts of bread and wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ. In so doing, the Spirit includes each time the Church and all its members into the Trinitarian circle of love.[49]

At the same time, the same Spirit who eternally shines forth from the Son toward the Father also manifests Himself through the threefold body of Christ and orients everything toward the love of the Father. Thus, the same Spirit who eternally moves between the Father and the Son operates a similar movement in the history of salvation, drawing the Church and the entire creation into the dynamic exchange of Trinitarian life. That being so, Stă-

[47] Stăniloae, "Relaţiile Treimice şi viaţa Bisericii," 506; "Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church," 15.

[48] Stăniloae, "Relaţiile Treimice şi viaţa Bisericii," 510; "Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church," 21.

[49] Stăniloae, "Relaţiile Treimice şi viaţa Bisericii," 514; "Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church," 27. For a detaled analysis of the Spirit's eternal and temporal rest upon the Son/Christ, see Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Bloomsbury, 2011), 125–129; Coman, *Dumitru Stăniloae's Trinitarian Ecclesiology*, 186–194.

niloae does not hesitate to point out that the movement of the Spirit *ad extra* informs us about the movement of the Spirit *ad intra*.[50]

To conclude this section, Stăniloae's Trinitarian theology represents one of the most sophisticated Orthodox attempts to articulate the inner life of the Trinity in close correlation with the life of the Church. Without collapsing the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity, he nevertheless insisted on their profound coherence. By distinguishing carefully between relations of origin and relations of manifestation, he safeguarded both the transcendence of God and the connection between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Drawing creatively on Byzantine sources, Stăniloae formulated a model in which the Spirit is eternally the love resting in the Son and shining forth toward the Father. This eternal dynamism of communion becomes, in history, the very structure of salvation. Thus, ecclesiology and the history of salvation are grounded not in abstraction but in the living mystery of God's own life.

Conclusions

This article sheds light upon the Trinitarian approach of two major Orthodox theologians of the past century: John Zizioulas and Dumitru Stăniloae. It is true that Zizioulas and Stăniloae never explicitly engaged one another; yet it is also true that the way they reflected on the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity reveals both a shared patristic inheritance and theological differences. In their treatment of the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, their common concern and the distinctiveness of their theological approach come most clearly into view.

Both theologians firmly reject any unqualified identification of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity, such as that proposed by Karl Rahner in modern Catholic theology. In continuity with the Greek patristic tradition, they maintain that while

[50] Stăniloae, "Relaţiile Treimice şi viaţa Bisericii," 517; "Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church," 31.

the economic Trinity truly reveals the immanent Trinity, it does not exhaust or circumscribe the mystery of God's inner life. In this shared conviction, both safeguard divine transcendence, Trinitarian apophaticism and freedom.

However, their major divergence lies in the emphasis each assigns to different theological concerns. In Zizioulas's theology, the central preoccupation is the preservation of divine freedom. For him, any theological attempt to unqualifiedly identify the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity creates the risk of subjecting God's eternal life to history and necessity. This is why Zizioulas insists that *Deus ad intra* remains always irreducible to *Deus ad extra*, precisely because the distinction between the two safeguards divine transcendence and the freedom of God, who is not bound by anything, not even by God's revelation in history.

When it comes to Stăniloae, he equally affirms the distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity; at the same time, he is more willing to regard the economic Trinity as a reflection or extension of the eternal relationships of communion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By distinguishing between relations of origin and relations of manifestation within the immanent Trinity, he creates space to claim that the missions of the Son and the Spirit in history are the extension *ad extra* of their eternal patterns of communion. Hence, for Stăniloae, the economy does not reproduce the relations of origin, but it does reveal the eternal dynamism of Trinitarian love. The circle of divine communion extends into history without being enslaved by it.

It is therefore accurate to say that the contrast between the theological approach of Zizioulas and Stăniloae is not between transcendence and immanence or between distinction and identity. It is a contrast between theological emphases and concerns that guide their views. While Zizioulas prioritizes the preservation of divine freedom and transcendence in order not to make God's eternal being dependent upon time and history, Stăniloae prioritizes the coherence between God's inner life and God's work in history in order to show that salvation and deification presuppose the extension of God's loving communion into the world.

Where Zizioulas stresses apophatic restraint, Stăniloae ventures a more cataphatic approach, yet without compromising the divine mystery.

Ultimately, both Zizioulas and Stăniloae converge in affirming that the God who acts in history is none other than the eternal God, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity is real, it does not amount to separation or disconnection. *Oikonomia* presupposes or is anchored in *theologia*; yet God's revelation discloses without exhausting.

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